



**University of
Zurich**^{UZH}

**Zurich Open Repository and
Archive**

University of Zurich
University Library
Strickhofstrasse 39
CH-8057 Zurich
www.zora.uzh.ch

Year: 2017

Lights on! Illuminating color notes from a dark nitrate room in the Netherlands

Stutz, Olivia Kristina

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-168371>

Scientific Publication in Electronic Form

Published Version

Originally published at:

Stutz, Olivia Kristina (2017). Lights on! Illuminating color notes from a dark nitrate room in the Netherlands. Zuerich: Filmcolors – an interdisciplinary approach.

FILMCOLORS – AN
INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH
([HTTPS://FILMCOLORS.ORG](https://filmcolors.org/))



By Olivia Kristina Stutz (<https://filmcolors.org/2016/02/21/team/>), PhD student, ERC Advanced Grant *FilmColors*

In mid-February 2017, as part of my PhD program ERC Advanced Grant (<http://filmcolors.org/2015/06/15/erc/>) *FilmColors* (<http://filmcolors.org/2015/06/15/erc/>), I began a two-month research visit at the EYE Filmmuseum (<https://www.eyefilm.nl/>) in the Netherlands, in the Department of Film Conservation and Digital Access (<https://www.eyefilm.nl/en/moving-to-the-collection-centre-the-technical-move>). There, I did an internship focused on nitrate films, under the supervision of silent film curator Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi (<https://nl.linkedin.com/in/elif-rogen-kaynakci-35295a17>) and film restorer Annike Kross (<https://nl.linkedin.com/in/annike-kross-9131002b/>). I started working with two other interns on the so-called Manshanden Collection: donated to the archive in 2013, it consists of roughly 150 cans of films. Like a detective's work, each can had to be inspected, identified and fully registered in the internal and public archival catalogues.

Based on our in-depth inspection of content and physical condition, further decisions and/or recommendations for preservation had to be made. By the time I left the Netherlands, the collection had turned out to be incredibly diverse, consisting of film prints not only from different countries – such as the Netherlands, United States, France, Denmark and Germany – but also dating from the early 1900s to the 1950s, with no discernible pattern to the collector's choices.

Overview

(<https://filmcolors.org/>)

About (<https://filmcolors.org/about/>)

Prev Post

(<https://filmcolors.org/2017/08/10/scopitones/>)

Next Post

(<https://filmcolors.org/2018/02/14/cif2018/>)

Search ...



Follow Blog via Email

Enter your email address to follow this blog and receive notifications of new posts by email.

Join 218 other subscribers

Email Address

Follow

Recent Posts

Massa (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/steve-massa-92271014>) of the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts, I was even lucky enough to find and identify what turned out to be a so-called 'lost & found case' of the black-and-white American slapstick short *Mustered Out* (USA 1920) featuring Charlie Chaplin impersonator and look-alike Billy West. If this weren't special enough, Steve helped me to prove that Charles F. Reisner – who later became a big comedy director – was part of this film and had worked with Billy West at this specific time of his life.



This news received such a big response on social media that even IMDb (http://german.imdb.com/title/tt1618868/?ref_=nm_filmg_act_20) added Reisner's name to the film's cast list. I am still thrilled by that major discovery. Not only had a silent film treasure that was considered lost been found: film history and film sociology had also been updated. As a result of this

experience, I could literally see how film historiography has been constantly changing due to new discoveries made within film archives and film institutes all over the world, with the help of a broad archival network and the in-depth knowledge of film curators.

During my research stay at the EYE, I was of course also interested in film colors. I photographed (colored) nitrate films, including some of the Manshanden Collection, with the specific camera set-up (<http://filmcolors.org/2014/08/06/loc/>) used in our project to document color films for the *Timeline of Historical Film Colors* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/>).

A further appeal of the collection is its variety and wide range of different color processes: from applied colors like tinting (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1216/>), toning (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1215/>), hand-coloring (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1212/>) or stencilling, (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1218/>) and their combined application (http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/filter/?_sft_ubercategory=tinting-and-toning&post_types=attachment,gallery), to mimetic colors from the three-color-process Technicolor No. IV (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1301/>).

For example, in the Pathé Frères short drama *Les Petits vagabonds* (Lucien Nonguet, FRA 1905) (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/galleries/les-petits-vagabonds-1905/>) I was startled by the stunningly deep and saturated red tints. Used narratively and symbolically in a dramatic scene with a big and seemingly very hot fire, they make you sweat just by looking at the colored frames. In fact, the red is so deep that, if you showed the film as a DCP at a festival, the audience would not believe that the color was authentic and you might be accused of digitally over-manipulating it during grading.

Speaking of which: have you ever looked at a Technicolor dye-transfer print and been astonished (or perhaps even disappointed?) that the red wasn't as red as you expected it to be, especially in view of all the

Color Mania – Exhibiting the Materiality of Color in Film and Photography (<https://filmcolors.org/2019/01/24/color-mania/>)
Fourth International Conference Colour in Film, London (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/12/21/cif2019/>)
Colorful Copyright Books by George Kleine at the Library of Congress (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/11/13/copyright-books/>)
Tagging for Users (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/10/01/tags/>)
Digitizing Amateur Films from the German Democratic Republic in Color (<https://filmcolors.org/2018/08/13/potsdam/>)

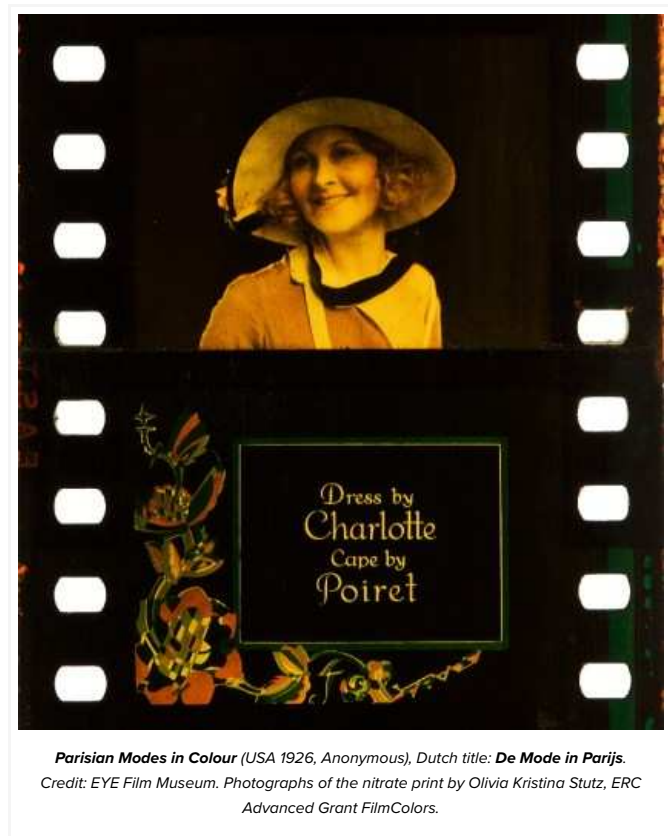
Follow me on Twitter

My Tweets (<https://twitter.com/461452216545456128>)

Earlier posts

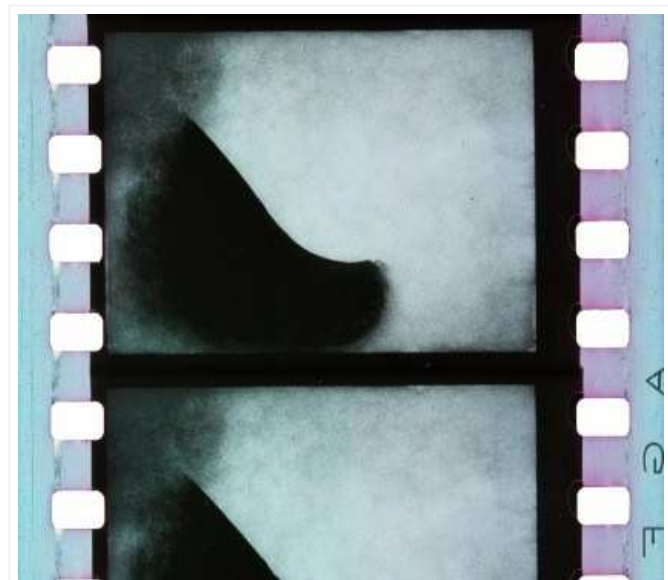
Select Month

more beautiful than ever" praise for recent Blu-ray restoration releases? Well, that happened to me with the color red in Disney's "Silly Symphony" animation *Mother Goose Goes to Hollywood* (Wilfred Jackson, USA 1938). Not only the red, but in fact all the colors, were quite dark and dim or even fuzzy-looking – in spite of the marvelous condition of the film material itself.



Other highlights of my stay at EYE included: seeing a Prizma film (<http://zauberklank.ch/filmcolors/galleries/van-indianen-tot-toeristen-een-tocht-door-amerikas-grand-canyon-1922/>) with its fringing effects for the first time; looking at a fashion film in two-color Kodachrome (<http://zauberklank.ch/filmcolors/galleries/de-mode-in-parijs-1926/>); seeing a Dutch stencilled version of Pathé Frères *La vie et la passion de notre seigneur Jésus Christ* (Lucien Nonguet / Ferdinand Zecca, FRA 1907) (<http://zauberklank.ch/filmcolors/galleries/la-vie-et-la-passion-de-jesus-christ-1907/>) with a vivid color scheme of pink and yellow.

A personal dream come true was to photograph the famous German historical avant-garde films *Opus II* (<http://zauberklank.ch/filmcolors/galleries/opus-ii-1922/>), *III* (<http://zauberklank.ch/filmcolors/galleries/opus-iii-1924/>) and *IV* (<http://zauberklank.ch/filmcolors/galleries/opus-iv-1925/>) (Walther Ruttmann, GER 1924–1925), as well as a hand-tinted version of the French avant-garde film *Ballet mécanique* (Fernand Léger / Dudley Murphy, FRA 1923) (<http://zauberklank.ch/filmcolors/galleries/le-ballet-mecanique-1923/>). Compared to the poor DVD versions available, these colors are absolutely stunning in terms of hue, saturation and lightness. The picturesque and expressive painting style of the artist – where you can actually see the brush strokes – was illuminating and gave me a sense of the artist's hand, its performative nature and its literal oscillation between form and shapelessness.






Opus II (GER 1922, Walter Ruttmann). Credit: EYE Film Museum. Photographs of the nitrate print by Olivia Kristina Stutz, ERC Advanced Grant FilmColors.


Finally, with the generous help of Mark-Paul Meyer (<http://www.markpaulmeyer.nl/bio.htm>), I was able to figure out both that the safety materials of the Opus films – compared to their nitrate positives – contain copying mistakes, and also that the famous purple transitioning in Opus IV might be a discolorization effect from an original blue to purple, due to the varnish applied in archives in the 1970s. These discoveries raise some necessary and complex questions for film archive restoration ethics, with regard to artistic property, authenticity and the ashes of time in general.


So, are you curious yet? I hope so. Do hop over to the *Timeline of Historical Film Colors* (<http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/>) and see the colored nitrate photographs for yourself. Lights out!


I would like to thank the entire EYE team for this wonderful and instructive experience, especially chief curator Giovanna Fossati, (<http://www.uva.nl/en/content/news/professor-appointments/2013/10/giovanna-fossati-professor-of-film-heritage-and-digital-film-culture.html>) Elif Rongen-Kaynakçi, Annike Kross, Catherine Cormon (<http://avpreservation.com/>) and Jeroen de Mol.


Share this:


 Facebook 107 (<https://filmcolors.org/2017/10/02/eye/?share=facebook&nb=1>)

 Twitter (<https://filmcolors.org/2017/10/02/eye/?share=twitter&nb=1>)

 Email (<https://filmcolors.org/2017/10/02/eye/?share=email&nb=1>)

 LinkedIn (<https://filmcolors.org/2017/10/02/eye/?share=linkedin&nb=1>)

 Pinterest 2 (<https://filmcolors.org/2017/10/02/eye/?share=pinterest&nb=1>)

 Reddit (<https://filmcolors.org/2017/10/02/eye/?share=reddit&nb=1>)

Like this:

Loading...

0

Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...